OVER THE TOP

The Story of St Silas, Hull

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teaching at S Mary's, Lowgate, and at All Saints. Then I went to Holy Innocents, Hammersmith, and to S Matthew's Sheffield.

I returned to Hull fully conscious of what I was going to do, and we did show the people of Hull some visible results of a great teaching. We were assailed with storms of incredible fury. I could show you records of these attacks which would astound you. In those days there were three newspapers in Hull, and they vied with each other continually, in their efforts to furiously denounce S. Silas, and the priest and the worshippers there, and all that was taking place.

This went on for a few years, and then deputations from Societies in London began to arrive. Their object was to cause trouble and break up the services. We had of necessity to appoint some hefty men to keep order and to officiate as chuckers-out.

The point at issue is, that now in 1937, the Church goes on all over Hull, uncriticised and. uninterrupted with its services. The objections have been fought and the points won.

I am grateful to the *Leeds Mercury* for saying, "The things Mr Baker taught at St. Silas, which aroused such fury, are now to be found in the services of the Church all over Hull, undisturbed. If Mr Baker had only accomplished the introduction of his teaching and practice at S Silas ONLY, his life's work would have been amply rewarded".

In those days we were the happiest people in the world. Absolutely united and determined, ready to give an answer and reason to every development of our faith. In the early days there was not a single church in Hull with daily mass or sung mass. Gradually churches kept adding this and then that. First a church would introduce daily mass, then another vestments, then incense, and others midnight mass at Christmass.

But S. Silas Church has the proud distinction of being the first to go OVER THE TOP, as it were".

The appointment of Mr Baker after his curacy in the notorious S. Matthew, Sheffield (where Protestant mobs nearly stoned the vicar, Father Ommanney, to death), caused a public outcry. Thus wrote the editor of the *Eastern Morning News* on April 9th 1894:

> "Among those in Hull who profess Low Church principles, there is rising some feeling of indignation at the High Church appointments which have been made in Hull recently. It is no secret that some of the appointments are regarded as encroachments, and another significant fact is the exodus of the Evangelical ministers from this diocese. What there is to account for this phenomenon I know not, but there are not wanting signs that the Archbishop (Maclagan) shows a preference for those having High Church principles...The late Archbishop Thompson was a man who had a pronounced objection to anything approaching ritual".

The English Churchman issued a warning:

> "The parishioners of S. Silas Hull would do well to wake up, and prepare for dangerous times".

Just how dangerous, no-one could have guessed, but a week before his arrival Mr. Baker sent a list of new services to the church. The most sinister was at 10.30 a.m. on Sundays - holy sacrifice and sermon. On each weekday there was matins and holy communion at 6.30 a.m. or 7 a.m., with evensong in the evening. He wrote to prepare the congregation in advance:

> "I am afraid that just during this next fortnight or so the newness of some of our ways may disturb some of us a little bit".

The newness did indeed disturb some people, including P. Shadwell who made it his business to visit the Church frequently and. report his findings to the *Hull Daily Mail*. All on one day he found there a copy of *Catholic Prayers*, from which he quoted the Hail Mary, a notice about confessions, and instructions to kneel in front of a crucifix or picture of Jesus to say certain prayers on getting out of bed. "Here we have the confessional and mariolatry openly taught in the Church of England". He even attended the holy sacrifice one Sunday and reported that the candles on the communion table were lit. In each seat he found, a book *With Jesus*, which included a prayer for the dead.

Many others went to see all this, and J. Cassell was "astounded, to find that he (Shadwell) had really only given a shadow of the practices which were carried on...The elevation of the Host is here practised". He was particularly scandalised to see that *Hymns Ancient and Modern* were sung.

Scarcely a week passed without a violent attack upon Mr Baker in the local press, but he was ably defended by Anthony and JR. JR wrote: "He keeps within the bounds of the Prayer Book, and is far more obedient to his superiors than the Low Church party are. I would finally say that the Ritualistic party's chief object is to raise the name of Jesus to the people...Go to a Ritualistic Church and you will find it full; but go to a Low Calvinistic Church (for these are the cause of the controversy) and you will find it empty".

Mr Baker was the first vicar in Hull to produce a weekly parish paper, and it is noteworthy that these are always full of spiritual exhortation and instruction, and never once refer to the raging controversies of the early years. They indicate a steady growth. Attendances on Sunday rose weekly. Moreover, on Sept 9th 1894, he wrote:

> "Our average at daily Evensong during the last ten days has been nearly fifteen. If we get a steady congregation and show signs of increase, we will certainly try to start daily Choral Evensong at the beginning of Advent. That was part of my plan when I first knew I was to come to S. Silas, but I didn't think it would be possible for a year or two; things are going on so much more happily that one ever had any right to expect".

Choral Evensong was established, as he desired. Later in the month he reported that a nun from the Kilburn Sisterhood would be coming to work in the parish. The life of the Church went from strength to strength.

The fame of S. Silas spread, and Mr. Kensit the notable bookseller of Paternoster Row (who was fined for selling indecent books before turning to the more lucrative trade of purveying Protestant literature) announced at a meeting in Harrogate that he was coming to S. Silas to remove all the statues "which were prayed at or prayed to". In an interview with the *Eastern Morning News* Mr. Baker said: "If Mr Kensit is only going to take away the images "which are prayed at or prayed to" he takes nothing. He cannot surely think the people of Hull are such fools as to imagine that any benefit can be derived from praying

to images. If he does, he must have a tile loose, and if he comes here with the object he appears to have in view, he will probably get a few more tiles loose".

It is almost certain that Mr Kensit did visit the Church, for his followers besieged the parish and interrupted services right up to the First World War. After that, attacks were more sporadic. A Hull branch of the *National Protestant League* was formed to coordinate the opposition. Throughout the early period the back pews were filled with men who moved forward in pairs whenever a stranger entered church, to sit on each side of him. In this way disturbances were kept to a minimum, and troublemakers were quickly bundled out. The Kensitite threat to remove the statues was never carried, out, and the only outcome was a fierce controversy about the statue of the Good Shepherd. The Archbishop visited the Church, and on seeing it in a side chapel advised Mr Baker to put it in a more prominent place.

The attitude of Archbishop Maclagan to the Catholic Movement is interesting. He was no sympathiser, despite the suspicions of the Evangelicals. He gave trouble (though also gave way) to Father Burn at All Saints, Middlesbrough, over reservation. But he gave proper acknowledgement to the marvellous pastoral work done by Anglo-Catholics in the slums. He knew enough to see that Catholic churches were better attended than Protestant ones, and that Protestant attacks were beyond sense and reason. It is very evident that he respected Mr. Baker immensely. His attitude is well illustrated by his action in the case of a complaint sent to him on 7th August 1894.

Twelve men, led by W. Iveson Taylor, listed eight "extreme Ritualistic practices": auricular confession, prayers for the dead, invocation of saints and mariolatry, fasting communion, the doctrine of a real and corporal presence of Christ in the bread and wine, lighted candles, eastward position, and the Agnus Dei. The Archbishop's Private Secretary replied that the Archbishop wanted to know how many of the signatories were parishioners of S. Silas. W. Iveson Taylor replied:

> "I am in receipt of your favour of the 13th inst., and in reply thereto beg to state that none of the memorialists whose names were forwarded to you are parishioners of S. Silas Church. Taking into consideration the illegality of the practices brought before your notice in the memorial forwarded to you, I thought you would only be too glad to

protect our beloved Church against any error which may be creeping in".

He then submitted the names of eleven actual parishioners who supported the complaint. The Secretary told him that the Archbishop was away. After two months Taylor again wrote, only to receive the following reply from his Grace:

> "The numerous questions of alleged false teaching which you bring before me are in several instances very incorrectly stated, and I do not feel called upon to enter upon the discussion of them with you as a non-parishioner, nor indeed under any other condition than that of a formal presentment from the churchwardens and certain parishioners of the parish. I may add that you are evidently very ill-informed as to the present state of the law with regard to the matters to which you refer".

Four years later the Archbishop was faced with a more serious petition as Protestant opposition increased. Meanwhile two events particularly added fuel to the already fierce fire. The first was the visit of Father Dolling. "Drypool" wrote to the *Hull Daily Mail* on 4th May 1896:

> "I hear that a Rev. Dolling is to preach at S Silas next Sunday. Is it possible that this is the "Father" Dolling who was ejected by his bishop from S. Agatha's, Landport, and has since been inhibited in other dioceses in England? I think we ought to have some information on this point. Let us hope that the Rural Dean will do his duty, ascertaining the truth, to protect us from such an invasion of one of the churches of our town".

Drypool had rightly guessed. It was Father Dolling, and invasion was the right word, for thousands came to hear him. Father Dolling, author of *Ten Years in a Portsmouth Slum*, had refused to comply with the request of the newly-appointed Dr. Randall Davidson, Bishop of Winchester, to stop reservation of the Blessed Sacrament. It was widely believed, by Anglo-Catholics as well as Protestants, that the bishop drove him out of Landport. Father Dolling had in fact told the bishop that he would resign at Easter, though he did so four months earlier under pressure from the bishop, who no doubt was glad to see him go at any time. Leaving S. Agatha's with a debt of £3000, he pledged to raise it after his departure. Subsequently he became

vicar of S. Saviour's Poplar until his death at the age of 51 in 1902.

"Luther" had warned the people:

> "May I ask all true Churchmen of Hull not to be led by idle curiosity to hear him, but to show their indignation of S. Silas and its Popish mummeries, by giving the church as wide a berth as possible".

"Christian Charity" urged "every man who is not a religious bigot to go and hear him". Tongue-in-cheek "Loyalist" thought "it needless for him to preach at S. Silas Church, which is already supplied with an eloquent preacher and faithful parish priest in Father Baker, and which is filled every Sunday with a splendid congregation. I would suggest that this famous minister would be likely to do far more good, and further the interests of the Church far better, by spending his time at S. Andrew's, Holderness Road, or at S. Peter's, Drypool".

Father Dolling's visit drew vast crowds. Even the editor of the *Hull Daily Mail* had to admit:

> "Yesterday Father Dolling preached three most impressive sermons, and being an active member of the Portsmouth School Board and Board of Guardians, was able to tell many stories of work in the Portsmouth slums. Many persons were in tears as they listened to the distressing tales. Four days is the length of Father Dolling's visit to S. Silas. On each day he will preach on several occasions. The collections will go towards meeting the debt upon S. Agatha's....Had S. Silas been as large as Holy Trinity it might have accommodated the worshippers who flocked there yesterday".

Someone else said: "Father Dolling, the priest in pawn, is moving Hull to tears. He holds prayer meetings on Wesley's model".

The second particular event, which caused bellowings from the Protestant bull (to quote a phrase of Mr. Baker's) was a paper read by Mr. Baker in S. Matthew's Church Institute. In it he strongly advised all Christians to assemble at their respective churches for mass, after which the Sunday could be spent in all kinds of innocent recreation, such as visiting art galleries, museums, open air concerts, football, cricket, and even theatres.

Hull's Primitive Methodist Council opened fire with a resolution recording

"its indignant protest against the views of the Rev. W.H. Baker MA, vicar of S. Silas, on Sabbath pursuits...Without dwelling on the blatant Romanism enunciated by one who is in the service and receiving the emoluments of a Protestant Church, when he urges the service of the mass, and the scandal it represents, this Council vigorously protests against his recommendation of Sunday sports, believing it to be not only a discreditable incitement to Sabbath desecration, which is full of danger to the community - especially to its youth - but a gross outrage on the Christian religion".

Father Baker retaliated on the following Sunday in a sermon which was reported thus in the *Hull Daily Mail*

"SUNDAY A FAILURE
REV W. H. BAKER EXPLAINS WHY
CHURCH, LOUNGE, AND RECREATION
PLEA FOR LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE
WORSHIP GOD AND DO WHAT YOU LIKE
THE "MASS" AT ST. SILAS.

There was a crowded congregation at S. Silas last night. The vicar, (the Rev W.H. Baker) took for his text the words "But when the Pharisees saw it they said unto him "behold thy disciples do that which it is not lawful to do on the Sabbath day", and he answered and said, "The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath day". Then the Pharisees went out and held a Council against him, how they might destroy him": Matthew 12, 28 and 14.

Controversy now raged in the press between "Morning Mass", "Protestant", "A Wesleyan", "Churchman", "Anti-Humbug", and others. There was growing evidence however that some were tiring of the Protestant rant. "Justice" expressed their mind:

"I have been very much surprised and disgusted by people (who I expect) profess to be Christians, criticising and scandalising every look, word or action, of the Rev. Mr. Baker. I have not the pleasure of knowing Mr. Baker personally, but by what I have heard of him from many quarters, he must be a thorough Christian and gentleman, and has done a great many charitable deeds, and much more good than many of our Christian workers. Neither has he made a big public show of it, and then he is

scandalised in the manner he is by people, who I fancy must be sadly in want of something better to do".

Not all shared this opinion, however. The storm was gathering. A service of vespers of the dead aroused antagonism; and if Dr. Maclagan had been able to dismiss Taylor's petition he was struck by a thunderbolt released in July 1898. Mr. J. Snowden sent him a petition signed by 200 parishioners. The editors of the three local papers printed the full text of the Petition, and the *Yorkshire Herald* made this editorial comment:

"The ultra-Roman practices and teaching which for the past 30 years, through the toleration of successive Bishops of London, have made S. Alban's, Holborn, notorious, are in danger of becoming eclipsed at S. Silas's Hull, in the Archdiocese of York, by the paternal indulgence of Dr Maclagan..."

The protest against the S. Silas' clergy is of too serious a character to be treated lightly or summarily by his Grace. For the document, which we give below *in extenso* was signed by about 200 persons, all being men and parishioners, as stated in the petition...The petition is of too influential a character to be ignored, the signatories, including leading business men, shopkeepers, and private householders are from different parts of the parish, and may be taken as representative of the whole".

The petition is so important as to justify reproduction here. It is typical of many protests against the Catholic Movement throughout the country.

"TO HIS GRACE
THE LORD ARCHBISHOP OF YORK

The published reports of your Grace's speech on the Ritual question in Convocation on June 8 encourage us, the undersigned men, being parishioners of S. Silas Church, Hull, to present to you this petition in the hope that you will exercise your undoubted authority to put down all illegalities both in the arrangements and in the services of our parish church.

We would name the following:-

1. In the arrangements of the church.

1. In the north aisle there is a second holy table, which is used for the purpose of celebrating, what is termed mass in the S. Silas' parish paper. Over this holy table is a retable, on which is placed a gilt crucifix. Before it burns a sanctuary lamp. A similar lamp burns before the holy table in the chancel.
2. In the same aisle are two images: the one of the Good Shepherd, before which a lamp is burning, the other of the Virgin Mary, before which are placed about a dozen small candles. The latter image is under a canopy, on which in placed the monogram "M R".
3. There are fourteen stations of the cross placed around the church.
4. There is a vessel containing "holy water" affixed to a pillar in the north aisle.
5. There are at least three places in the church at which auricular confession is practised. At the east end of the south aisle there is a wooden screen in which is fixed a grating, through which confessions are heard, the priest sitting in the vestry, the penitent kneeling outside in the aisle of the church. Mats for kneeling are provided, in each instance, and a small crucifix hangs on the wall close by.
6. In the church is placed a table, on which lie certain devotional manuals stamped with the name of the church. We would especially draw your Grace's attention to the following:

    1. One booklet is entitled *Two Ways of Hearing Mass*, and is published by the Catholic Truth Society. On the eighth page of this booklet are the following "Maxims on the mass: The man who loves the mass is a happy man. The man who loves the mass has the pledge of saving his soul. The man who loves the mass will never despair. The man who loves the mass will not long delay his confession. The man who loves the mass will not go far wrong. If he falls he will soon rise again. The mass expresses and relieves the deepest feelings of the soul. The mass is our comfort in distress. The mass is

our anchor of hope. You cannot go too often to mass, do not be satisfied with going to mass on Sundays. The love of the mass will not "grow" in you unless you go often. You cannot appreciate nor draw abundant fruit from the mass by going only once a week. You cannot enjoy it unless you go often, for the Mass is a daily joy and comfort".

2. Another booklet (36 pages), published by the Catholic Truth Society, and placed on the table is *A Way of Assisting at Holy Mass according to the Ends of our Sacrifice* by the Rev G. R. Kingdon, S.J. This was published in 1897.

3. A book called *Hosanna: A Mass Book for Children*, by the author of *A Book for the Children of God*, with preface by the Rev R.A.T. Suckling, published by W. Knott in 1891, containing teaching which is utterly contrary to the doctrine contained in the Thirty-Nine Articles, is also placed for use.

2. In the services of the church.

1. The Romish Festivals of Corpus Christi and All Souls Day are observed.
2. The holy communion is termed the "mass" in the monthly parish papers, and on the notices at the Church door.
3. The "six points" of ritual - viz. hiding of the manual acts, the use of the mixed chalice, wafer bread, altar lights, vestments, and incense, are observed.
4. At the moment of the consecration of the bread a small bell in the chancel is rung three times. At the consecration of the wine the same thing takes place, after which the church bell is tolled three times.
5. At the 7 a.m. celebration of the holy communion (termed "sung mass" in the parish paper for June 1893), on Thursday, June 9, 1898, ("Corpus Christi") the following announcement was made by the vicar:
"At the end of the present service we have to take the Blessed Sacrament to a person who is

ill in the parish, so we should be glad if the people kneel as the Blessed Sacrament passes down the church."

And we may add that the teaching given from the pulpit is in conformity with the services and. arrangements of the church as above described, and so far is entirely opposed to the principles of the Church as laid down in the Thirty-Nine Articles to which the vicar has subscribed.

Your Grace's attention having again been drawn to these matters we earnestly hope that you will, without further delay, take such steps as will effectually put an end to the grief which has been caused to loyal members of the Church of England in this parish and in the city at large, and your answer will be anxiously looked for".

Dr. Maclagan's Private Secretary acknowledged receipt of the memorial and promised an enquiry.

The Churchwardens and Synodsmen pledged support to Mr. Baker in a Statement to the Archbishop much longer than the petition, attempting to answer all the charges and justify their beliefs as members of the Church of England. One of them wrote to the *Yorkshire Herald*:

"Before the present vicar came the Sunday morning congregation sometimes numbered only about 20 people, now the church is full every Sunday. There is no more united congregation in the diocese, and each member is prepared to support the vicar to the fullest extent".

The press raised one unanimous voice against Mr. Baker, but letters from both sides blazed red hot. Mr. Baker rose to the challenge, and the following advertisement appeared in the *Eastern Morning News* of 30th July:

"S. SILAS PATRONAL FESTIVAL
11 a.m. Procession and Missa Cantata
Sermon by the vicar on
THE REVIVAL OF RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION."

Meanwhile, the Archbishop requested Mr. Baker to investigate the petition. Mr. Baker replied by letter dated 25th July, as follows:

"I beg to thank your Grace for allowing me to investigate the enclosed petition. I have during the last few days visited the majority of the

signatories. I enclose...an abstract of the results of my enquiries. The results were as follows:

Total number of signatures 187.

Addresses incorrect or insufficient so that I have not been able to visit them 12.
Of the remaining 175 I have examined as specimens of the whole, 108:-
Methodists 44
No religious practice or profession 39
Salvation Army 14
Baptist, lapsed Romanist, Protestant 3
Self-styled churchmen but non-communicants 8

4 signatures are these of lads, of whom one is 15 years of age. The lads did not themselves sign but a canvasser wrote their names in the Salvation Army Barracks.

The S.A. Adjutant and the Wesleyan preacher and the Primitive Methodist lay preachers not only signed but procured signatures.

A considerable number of the signatories, including, the first, J. Principle, have expressed a wish to dissociate themselves from the petition. Some say they only signed to get the men out of the house. The signatories did not see the petition nor did many of them know much of its purpose. B. Davies thought that it was to obtain the Archbishop's consent to the further beautifying of the church. None of the principal employers of labour have signed it.

Mr. Baker, in his letter, also answered the various charges. Since there were no stained glass windows he used statues "as our poor man's Bible", for many parishioners could not read. Stations of the cross were used for meditating on the Passion. The books are devotional aids. The Bishop of Bristol had said "the word Mass is a good old English word". No changes in ritual were made without the vote of the Communicants' Guild. The use of incense was their unanimous choice. They naturally ought to be consulted if retrograde steps were to be taken now.

The Archbishop was satisfied with Mr. Baker's reply, and informed Mr. J. Snowden of his investigation. All hell was let loose. Snowden sent a furious reply to Dr. Maclagan. The newspapers reeked with letters from "Observer", "Churchman",

"Falcon", "Luther", "Protestant", "Anglican", J. Snowden, and others. Members of the PCC sent letters of exultation. The following jingle also appeared:

"Father Baker, Father Baker,
Don't you hear 'em drumming,
Father Baker, Father Baker,
The Snowdonites are coming".
Father Baker, Father Baker,
The holy water quick;
Father Baker, Father Baker,
Lay it on 'em thick.
Father Baker, Father Baker,
Use the garden hose,
Father Baker, Father Baker,
And screw off the rose".

Mr. Snowdon released to the press his private correspondence with the Archbishop. This drew the following retort from the Private Secretary:

"The Archbishop of York, who is at present away from home, was about to reply to your letter of Friday last when he learned that, with the assistance of the editor of one of the York newspapers, you had made public a letter which the Archbishop, for very sufficient reason, had marked "private". After this breach of confidence and courtesy you will see that it is impossible for his Grace to continue any correspondence with you; and further, the Archbishop will feel obliged in future to take no notice of similar communications, from whatever quarter, unless forwarded to him through the churchwardens of the parish".

J. Snowden in reply said he was "astonished", and the editorials of those days pilloried the Archbishop, accuse him of wrecking the Church of England, and making Cardinal Vaughan laugh.

The fuss over the petition gradually died away, but Mr. Baker was never out of the papers for long. His sermons were so witty, pithy, and informative, that snippets were frequently remembered and reported. "They heard a great deal of talk nowadays in the newspapers and elsewhere about "not having a man between their souls and God. Could a man baptise himself? The Revd W.H. Baker, at S. Silas Church Hull, last evening". "My business is to preach the Prayer Book". "From this

pulpit I could throw 5 stones into 5 Religious Clubs round here". "There is much talk nowadays of the lawlessness of the clergy. To my mind, there is ten times more lawlessness among the laity, said the vicar of S. Silas, yesterday morning, alluding to the decline of the observance of fasting in the Church".

Even his enemies agreed that Mr Baker was a great teacher and social reformer; indeed he had been a schoolmaster before ordination, and came from a well-known Quaker family, before his conversion. He was a stern disciplinarian, demanded that Services began on the dot, and entertained no slackness in the matter of religion. His successor at S. Silas, Father Jackson, used to relate how the men of the parish delighted to tell him of beatings they received as boys from Mr. Baker.

Through clear conviction he overcame all opposition, and became intensely admired for his social work. By 1893 he was distributing 2000 free meals to children every week. During the smallpox epidemic he was asked to be chaplain at the hospital, and he visited it every day, anointing the dying, and praying with relatives, heedless of his own safety. As the years went by his detractors were diminished, and peace reigned in the press. Every newspaper reported his resignation in December 1936, and everyone expressed profound sorrow. Thus, the *Hull Daily Mail*:

HULL VICAR TO RETIRE

Revd W.H. Baker's 43 years in a Parish

Hull church people will learn with regret that the Revd W.H. Baker, vicar of S. Silas Church, Hull, is to retire soon. Mr. Baker has been vicar of S. Silas for 43 years, and for 20 years he has never been absent from the church on a Sunday.

When he went to S. Silas he introduced the full teaching and ceremonial of the Oxford Movement, which was little known in Hull in those days, and considerable excitement was caused.

Mr Baker will also be remembered for the great work he did as chaplain during the smallpox scourge.

The story of S. Silas is really the story of Father Baker (as he refused to be called). The foundations he laid were never shaken, and when through the shift of population the doors were opened for the last time, it was for a service, which he might have planned himself. The continuity of Catholic Tradition was ensured when the Archbishop appointed as his successor,

the Revd W. Jackson. Father Jackson, like Father Baker, spent his whole ministry among the people of Sculcoates, and before his translation to S. Silas (where he remained for over twenty years until ill-health caused him to retire) he was priest in charge of S. Clement. During his lifetime he was regarded as a saint, a gentle and compassionate man. Stories abounded as of how, on seeing a man without shoes he promptly removed his own and gave them to the poor man, walking home unshod. When Father Jackson left the life of the Church was known to be limited, and so the Archbishop put there a priest in charge, Father Derek Darley. After his departure, and until the closure of the church, the tradition was maintained by Father Douglas Carter, vicar of S. Alban, Hull, who later became General Secretary of the Church Union.

Always S. Silas has been **OVER THE TOP.**